

1 The Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin and Anglo-American cognitive linguistics

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Jerzy Bartmiński and his team have developed, over the last 30–40 years, a distinctive cognitive-linguistic approach to the study of language in its cultural context – an approach which I will refer to, in this introduction, as the ‘Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin’ (Zinken, 2004a). This work is well known in the international Russian-speaking academic discourse of the humanities in Eastern Europe. It is represented by an international journal, *Etnolingwistyka*, which was founded by Bartmiński and has been published annually since 1988. The list of publications of Jerzy Bartmiński alone runs to about 400 entries.¹ However, this work has not until now been available in English. The present book makes some of Bartmiński’s key papers accessible to an English-reading audience for the first time. Most chapters are revised versions of the original publications, others have been written specifically for this volume (cf. ‘Original sources of papers’).

This book appears in a series dedicated to ‘Advances in cognitive linguistics’. The ‘advance’ to which the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin can contribute concerns the systematic consideration of speakers’ socio-cultural situatedness in the linguistic analysis of meaning and understanding. This is an issue that has received considerable attention in cognitive linguistics in recent years (e.g., Frank, Dirven, Ziemke, and Bernárdez, 2008). The substantial convergences between the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin and Anglo-American cognitive linguistics make me optimistic about the chances of such a contribution. It is the aim of this introductory chapter to outline some of those convergences, and to sketch some of the distinctive characteristics of Bartmiński’s cognitive ethnolinguistics.

The work of the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin has its roots in Bartmiński’s research on the folk variety of Polish (Bartmiński, 1973), which combined the dialectological and stylistic description of the phonetics, morphology, vocabulary and syntax of folk poetic texts. From this very beginning, Bartmiński’s work has always been grounded in close analyses of a very rich database of ethnolinguistic data, which include everyday conversations, stories, narratives about life and work, and interviews with rural speakers as well as songs, fairy tales, proverbs, and folk poetry. This immersion in a wealth of data is indicative of a passion for the living folk culture in its everyday and artistic dimensions that is the driving force behind linguistic analysis in the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin. When I first experienced that passion first-hand – in 1999, on a field trip which aimed to find linguistic and folkloristic traces of the bygone multicultural (Jewish-Polish-Ukrainian) life in the contemporary Polish-Ukrainian border region – the ethnolinguistic archive at Lublin contained approximately 1,300 audio and video tapes of data. The development of cognitive-linguistic analytic concepts in this tradition,

it seems to me, needs to be understood as much as a response to the necessity of dealing with this amount of rich 'real-world' data, as it needs to be understood as an attempt to give a theoretical account of the relations between language, culture and mind. This orientation towards the description of real-world data is a crucial characteristic of the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin when compared to Anglo-American cognitive linguistics, which has always been much more focused on theory-development.

The work on the folk variety of language has, over time, developed into an ambitious project: The reconstruction of the 'linguistic worldview' of rural speakers of Polish in the *Dictionary of Folk Symbols and Stereotypes*, which is being published since 1996 (SSSL, 1996–1999). Also, in the 1980s, Lublin ethnolinguists developed a second focus of empirical research: the study of terms referring to culturally important (embraced, contested) values (Bartmiński and Mazurkiewicz-Brzozowska, 1993b). This work has spanned terms referring to abstract values (such as *responsibility* and *truth*), human attitudes (such as *equality* or *solidarity*), social life (such as *freedom* or *tolerance*), individual and group behaviour (such as *revolution* or *work*), names for human communities (such as *family* or *nation*), names for political, social, and cultural institutions (such as *church* or *state*), names for persons and objects that are considered cultural values (such as *father* or *bread*), and names for objects that symbolise a value (such as the *cross*). The major project in this area to date has been the comparison of the concept of homeland (fatherland) in twelve European languages (Bartmiński, 1993b). Again, the research on value terms needs to be understood as much as a response to a particular social situation in Poland as it needs to be understood as motivated by a theoretically based conviction about the fundamental importance of values for linguistic meaning (chapter 4). In chapter 2 of the present book, Bartmiński traces the current popularity of ethnolinguistics in Eastern Europe to the socio-cultural experiences of these countries in recent decades, and the phenomenon of communist 'newspeak' in particular. By examining the meaning of value terms as it is entrenched in colloquial language varieties, by analysing its etymological roots and historical changes, contemporary ideological abuses of these terms – and the values they indicate – can be exposed.

These two research areas have been – and continue to be – the main context in which Bartmiński's intuitions and observations about the close links between language and culture have been developed into a coherent and distinctive set of analytic concepts, which is introduced in detail in the first part of the present book (chapters 1–9). Let me introduce some of these concepts in a very small nutshell.

The overall aim of Bartmiński's research is to reconstruct the *linguistic worldview* of an idealised speaking subject: an inhabitant of rural Poland, a student, a child, an average speaker of colloquial Polish, etc. (chapter 3). This 'view' is accessible, reconstructable, via the description of *stereotypes*, understood, following Putnam (1975), as judgements that are primarily descriptive, secondarily evaluative (chapter 5). Stereotypical judgements are captured in the *cognitive definition*, which is intended to be a definition of the concept as it could be given by the envisaged idealised subject (chapter 6). The term *cognitive* here therefore means something like 'as understood by the subject': it is the job of the ethnolinguist to reconstruct the linguistically entrenched interpretation of the world by a subject in terms that are meaningful for that subject (chapter 2). This

means that the explication of meaning should take into account the speakers' socio-cultural situatedness. The cognitive definition aims to reconstruct the *point of view* and *perspective* of the envisaged subject (chapter 7), by examining the main *facets*, or *aspects*, through which the object is conceptualised, resulting in a subject-bound conceptual *profile* (chapter 8).

Even this very cursory glance at some of the basic concepts of the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin should show that there are considerable convergences between this work and certain traditions within Anglo-American cognitive linguistics, in particular work on lexical semantics and conceptualisation. These convergences are based in a shared holistic approach to meaning, the attempt to characterise meaning against a broader experiential background. However, since the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin has developed independently of Anglo-American cognitive linguistics, and in the context of folkloristic, dialectological, and ethnographic work, it is not surprising that the stress is sometimes placed differently.

The concept of profiling is a case in point. Bartmiński introduced this term in a first report on the planned *Dictionary of Folk Symbols and Stereotypes* (SSSL) in 1980 (Bartmiński, 1980), and developed it in several later publications. The concept of profiling in Bartmiński's work is a key element in what could be called a 'tamed holism': on the one hand, Bartmiński would agree with Anglo-American cognitive linguists that a description of meaning that appropriately captures speakers' knowledge cannot be restricted to 'necessary and sufficient' features. On the other hand, he stresses that some stereotypical judgements about an object are clearly more important than others from a particular *point of view* (this argument is made explicitly in chapter 11, in a critical discussion of Lakoff's (1987) analysis of the concept *mother*). Overall, Bartmiński's holism remains in friendly contact and discussion with (European) structuralism and schools of thought that have grown out of this tradition, such as the semiotics of Ivanov and Toporov (1965), the ethnolinguistics of Tolstoy (1997), the lexicography of Apresyan (1995), and, most importantly, the cognitive linguistics of Anna Wierzbicka (in particular her 1985 book *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*). The concept of profiling aids in a description that reconstructs not just the linguistically entrenched stereotypical judgements about an object, but also their order when the object is seen from a particular *perspective*, understood as a metaphor for the social situatedness of the subject.

Therefore, while the concept of profiling in the work of Bartmiński is close to what Langacker (1987) calls profiling, the focus is clearly placed differently. While Langacker aims to describe a universally operative semantic process, Bartmiński intends to reconstruct a particular socio-cultural situatedness. A profile is a particular configuration of linguistically entrenched judgements, a configuration that is typical for a particular speaking subject. This subject is (usually) not an individual person, but an idealised subject: a member of a particular socio-cultural group. The reconstruction of sociocultural situatedness with the help of conceptual profiles is nicely illustrated in Bartmiński's analysis of changes in the stereotype of Germans in Poland (chapter 14). There is a large number of stereotypical judgements about Germans that are entrenched in Polish lexemes, idioms, and 'topoi' (chapter 5 develops the different levels of formal

entrenchment of stereotypes). These judgements have a social history, and can therefore be used to reconstruct different profiles of 'a German' that were salient throughout the history of Polish-German contacts: the German as *the prototypical foreigner* (construed from a *cultural* point of view), the German as *the invading enemy* (construed from an *ideological* point of view), the German as *a well-off Western European* (construed from a *civilisational* point of view) etc. Different profiles of the stereotypical judgements that make up the language's 'experiential base' are "at the disposal of the speaker as his or her cultural endowment" (p. 24), and while the perception of Germans as well-off Western Europeans might currently be the 'default' in most situations, the other profiles are also available: entrenched in cultural artefacts, e.g., post-war films, kept alive by particular political groups etc.

The differentiation of conceptual profiles is an important tool for anthropological-linguistic studies: it brings out the *intra-linguistic* cultural diversity that can be at least as striking as cross-linguistic cultural diversity. Different linguistic 'worldviews' can exist within a community of people speaking the same language. This important point is exemplified most clearly in the contrastive analysis of the Polish concepts *los* and *dola*. Both of these can be described with the English word *fate*, but they provide very different 'perspectives' onto the human situation: Bartmiński, following Wierzbicka, traces *los* to the Enlightenment period, which promoted a belief in the possibilities of the individual to determine their 'fate'. *Dola*, on the other hand, is traced to the perspective of the 'simple' peasant, who experiences the determining nature of 'fate' for the individual's life. Importantly, this intra-linguistic cross-cultural approach cautions against premature conclusions about the 'mythical national character' (p.211) of the speakers of a language, an argument that is made in a critical discussion of Wierzbicka's juxtaposition of Pol. *los* with Russ. *sud'ba* (see chapter 16).

The 'cultural' orientation of the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin has ramifications for the understanding of some important cognitive linguistic concepts. One of these is the concept of experience, or the 'experiential frame' within which profiles operate (chapter 8). In Bartmiński's work, it is not only an individual's 'first hand' experience that enters their experiential frame, but also experience entrenched in 'social memory', i.e. in stereotypical judgements. Put differently, verbal encounters and verbally mediated learning are themselves important experiences that provide resources for conceptualisation. Furthermore, experiencing always happens in an already culturally meaningful world. The individual always experiences a culturally meaningful environment – an environment in which salient objects can be intangible (the telling of a narrative) or 'concrete' (moving around in one's home). In the case of Pol. *dom* (house/home) (chapter 12), Bartmiński distinguishes three aspects, or dimensions, in which this object is understood: a spatial dimension (the building), a social dimension (a community), and a functional dimension (an institution: the family). He goes on to emphasise that '[t]hese are by no means separate dimensions; on the contrary, they make up a conceptual whole with different aspects' (p.150). The contention that the 'spatial' aspect of 'concrete' objects, such as houses, should not be treated as conceptually separate from, or even basic to, 'communal' aspects of those objects can serve as a reminder of the fact that 'purely spatial' concepts are a modern invention, that the separation of an

abstract dimension of 'space' from the world of experienced places is a relatively recent development (Urry, 2000).

This characterisation of the experience of the 'spatial' world as always already socio-culturally meaningful seems perfectly in line with some early definitions of experience in Anglo-American cognitive linguistics, which emphasised the cultural nature of all experience (Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). It therefore seems that the work of Bartmiński, which specifically focuses on this cultural dimension, might usefully complement work in Anglo-American cognitive linguistics, and enrich our thinking about the nature of 'experience' as a background for linguistic meaning.

A final caveat: fruitful exchange between academic traditions is not easy. Relatively superficial differences can sometimes block the path to an understanding, and enrichment, of what is shared. This seems to be notoriously so when the encounter occurs between an 'Anglo-American' and a 'Continental' tradition (Kuhn, 1979). Nevertheless, I think that it will become evident to the reader of this book that cognitive linguistics and the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin have a lot in common, and I hope that the reader will find an engagement with the work of Jerzy Bartmiński both enjoyable and intellectually stimulating.

Notes

- 1 See also Bartmiński (2004b).